

A Lifeline

by TT-5

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Summary: May 1945 - Andrew had been planning on being back in Hastings in time for tea, maybe walking to the station once he got off the train to surprise his father but an unexpected situation leaves him in need of a lifeline, one that has been there all his life.

A Lifeline

May 1945

"Dad?"

"Andrew? What's happened?"

'How does he do that? Know, even over the telephone, that something's wrong without me saying anythingâ€| ' "Andrew?"

The undercurrent of fear in Dad's usually calm voice was enough to make him to struggle against the dreadful pounding in his head and try to explain "Hurts" _'not much of an explanationâ€| '_

There was a sharp intake of breath from Dad and Andrew tried again, "Got off the trainâ€|too many tunnelsâ€|hurts Dad."

"Your head?"

"Yes"

"Right, where are you now?"

"Train station."

"In Hastings?"

"No, not sure where, sorry."

"No, no that's all right but I do need to know so I can come get you. Is there a sign anywhere or someone you can ask, a station master?"

Andrew looked around and then almost fell over as a wave of vertigo hit him. He gripped the edge of the phone box and squeezed his eyes shut as he willed the feeling to pass.

"Andrew?" Dad prompted, the worry in his voice so thick Andrew could almost taste it.

"Sorry, dizzy" he took a deep breath and forced his eyes open again, carefully counting breaths the way he had learned to do those final months he was flying, '_least I don't have to worry about someone trying to shoot me down nowâ€|'_

"Look, Andrew, I understand that you're feeling wretched right now but I can't come and get you if I don't know where you areâ€|"

_'Christ it almost sounds like Dad's panicking!' _"Sorry Dad." He turned carefully this time and took in the small station platform that he had disembarked onto fifteen minutes earlier after deciding that his head would actually explode if he had to go through one more tunnel.

He had stumbled off the train and over to the small patch of grass behind the station where he had thrown-up his breakfast. Unfortunately that had only made him feel worse and when he managed to catch his breath he had crossed to the phone box and called Dad.

"Can you see a sign Andrew?"

'Right, that's what he was supposed to be doing.' He squinted and was able to make out the customary black sign with white lettering and blinked trying to make it out. Black dots crowded his vision and he took a deep breath, counting to five before letting it out. "Stonegate"

"That's where you are, Stonegate?"

"Yes, sorry long way."

"Don't apologize, I'm _very_ glad you called and I'll be there as soon as I can."

Those were the words he'd needed to hear, he realized as his shoulders relaxed. Just the knowledge that Dad was coming made him feel better in a way nothing else could. "Thanks Dad"

"Andrew, is there anyone else there?"

He looked around again but the station was deserted, "Not that I can see."

"Right" Dad's voice had that worried thoughtful tone that it used to get if Andrew mentioned an op over scotch when he was home on leave. He could hear a muffled conversation going on but his head hurt too much to do more than recognize that Dad was one of the

participants.

Then Dad was speaking directly to him, his voice tight with worry, "Andrew? I'm going to leave now with Hugh, but it will take us close to an hour to get there I'm afraid."

"That's all right."

Dad made a gruff sound in his throat; "Really Dad, I'll just ummâ€¦" he trailed off because he honestly had no idea what he'd do. It wasn't like he'd planned on this. He'd been planning on being back in Hastings in time for tea, maybe walking to the station once he got off the train to surprise Dad.

He certainly hadn't planned on feeling too dreadful to finish the trip and instead having to ask Dad to come and get him; like he had when he was twelve and had managed to get off at a different station than Mum.

"Go and sit down Andrew, preferably on a bench." The familiar undercurrent of dry humor was overshadowed by the gentleness of Dad's voice. "Just try and rest son, I promise I'll be there as soon as I can."

Suddenly he didn't want to hang up the phone. It was stupid because if Dad were on the phone he couldn't be coming to get him but he didn't feel sensible or brave. He felt like an ill little boy who desperately wanted his father. He made a noise that had probably started as a word but came out as a garbled cry.

"_Andrew_"

Dad sounded gutted and Andrew took a gulping breath "S-sorry"

"Nnoo, not your fault. Yes I know Hugh butâ€¦" There was a hasty muffled conversation and then Dad's voice again, "Andrew, do you want me to stay on the phone with you? Hugh says he can come for you himself then I could talk to you until he gets there."

Andrew considered this and then shook his head, "No, I'll be all right."

"You're sure?" Dad pressed, his voice gruff with emotion.

"Yes, sorry...it was justâ€¦" He took a deep breath, suddenly feeling exhausted. "I'll be alright Dad, promise."

There was a shaky intake of breath but when Dad spoke again his voice was steady, "Alright I'm leaving now and I'll be there as soon as I can Andrew."

They said goodbye and then the phone went dead. He stood there holding it for a few moments before hanging it up and stepping out of the phone box. Everything felt too bright and his head throbbed in protest.

He managed another few steps before the nausea overtook him again and he bent over heaving. He felt shaky by the time the spell had passed, his shirt damp with sweat and he shivered miserably as a soft breeze blew through the station.

"I say lad are you all right?"

Andrew looked up, squinting against the sun, and saw a short, older man in a stationmaster's uniform studying him with concern, "Yes Sir."

"That so? Well looks to me like you've had better days; a good cup of tea is what you need. Can you stand? That's it, good it's just this way." And suddenly he was on his feet and walking slowly toward the stationmaster's office. "Here we are lad, you just sit there and take a rest while I put the kettle on."

Andrew blinked, wondering how they'd gotten here so quickly before deciding he was too tired to try and figure it out, so he just let the older man settle him in the slightly uncomfortable chair with a quiet murmur of "Thank you Sir."

There was something very calming about the sound of tea being made and Andrew let himself relax into it, his mind drifting through memories; '_Mum singing as she set the kettle to boil and pulled hot biscuits out of the oven, Dad in his shirtsleeves moving around the kitchen with his usual quiet efficiency. Tea with Rex and Douglas in the mess hut, first laughing over the excitement of a successful op and then as the weeks wore on sitting in numb silence trying not to wonder why they had come back instead of someone else.'_

'Forcing mugs of sugary tea into the shaking hands of young men who had just lost their innocence in one fell swoop. Sitting alone in the mess in Malta with the mug of cold tea he'd been holding for hours as the Wing Commander's words, 'done your bit, honorable discharge' echoed in his head.'

"Here you go lad." He came back to himself with a start and would have spilled the mug of tea if not for the stationmaster's steadying hand, "Sorry lad, didn't mean to startle you."

"No my fault," he took a sip and then looked up, forcing a weak smile, "Thanks very much."

"No trouble lad, now are you waiting for a train?"

Andrew shook his head, wincing at the pain the movement induced, "No Sir, my father's coming."

"By car?"

"Yes Sir."

"Right then, I'll keep an eye out you just worry about getting that tea into you." It was exactly the type of thing Sgt. Rivers or Mr. Reid would say and Andrew found himself blinking back tears yet again. '_Christ I'll be worse than Mrs. Mallory at this rate!'_

The pain had dulled somewhat, and now his head just ached with the steady regularity of a spitfire's engine, '_it's a funny thing to miss, the feel of the engine, doubt I'll ever feel anything like it again'_'_ His thoughts drifted again as he mechanically drank his tea.

"Andrew?" Andrew blinked, eyebrows knitting together in a frown, '_That sounds like_ _Dad but it can't beâ€|'_ "Andrew, can you look at me?"

He blinked again and his father's face came into focus, "Dad?"

The tense lines around Dad's eyes loosened as he carefully laid a hand on Andrew's knee, "Yes Andrew, I'm here."

"How? Maltaâ€|takes weeksâ€|." His head throbbed and he rubbed at his left eye in irritation, '_If this was just another dream he mightâ€|'_

"We aren't in Malta Andrew, you came home a few weeks ago. You were just up in London visiting Charles and Alice and then you got off the train here in Stonegate and Hugh and I drove up to get you." Dad's voice slow and steady, just like always.

'_Stonegateâ€|trainâ€|tunnels!'_ He nodded and met Dad's worried gaze again, "Oh rightâ€|I'm sorryâ€|"

The hand on his knee tightened, "Don't be." There was something in the way Dad said it that made him look up again. Dad was crouching in front of him, his eyes so heavy with worry that Andrew suddenly wished he were five years old again and could throw himself into Dad's arms and hold on until they both felt better.

But he wasn't five and they were Englishmen so he nodded instead and forced a weak smile that Dad returned as he got to his feet. "Ready to go then?"

Andrew nodded again and allowed Dad to help him up, his jaw clenched tightly against the pain that was still hammering in his head. He closed his eyes for a minute and when he opened them again Hugh Reid was on his other side. "Mr. Reid?"

Hugh smiled reassuringly, "Hullo Andrew, ready to go?"

"Yes Sir." He paused and looked at the stationmaster, "Thank you for the tea Sir, very kind of you."

The old man smiled warmly, "You're most welcome lad, come back anytime."

Andrew smiled weakly and then let Dad and Mr. Reid guide him to the car. They eased him into the back seat and he was pathetically grateful when Dad slid in beside him. His head ached and all he wanted to do was curl up in a ball in the back of his closet and stay there, like he had the day after Mum's funeral.

But he was in the back of a motorcar so he instead he lay down, pulling his knees in and turning so that he was lying with his head in Dad's lap, his face buried in Dad's waistcoat. If either Dad or Mr. Reid were surprised they made no mention of it, instead Mr. Reid started the car and Dad ran a soothing hand through his hair.

He knew he ought to be stronger than this, that at 25 his first instinct probably shouldn't still be to call his father. But Andrew was tired, tired of being the oldest, the strong one, tired to

telling boys to keep calm and carry on when the entire world seemed to have gone to hell.

He must have made some type of noise because Dad began to murmur softly to him, "I know it feels like you don't know if you're coming or going just at the moment Andrew and I know how unpleasant that is but I promise that you get through it."

'_You get through it' _the same words Dad had spoken right before he left for training. He still wasn't quite sure how or why but the very fact that he was here was proof that Dad had been right. "Hate this," he whispered into Dad's waistcoat.

"I know son so do I, but I promise we'll get through it. Just try and rest now." '_He could do that now, no debriefings or lads to comfortâ€|'_ "Shhâ€|shhh you're all right." And for the first time in a long time Andrew Foyle actually believed that he might be as he shut his eyes and let himself fall asleep.

The End

End
file.